

5758 Blackstone Ave.
Chicago 37, Illinois
17 December 1962

Joshua Lederberg

Dear Josh:

I am writing you because, very confidentially, I am thinking of leaving Chicago sometime in the next couple of years if I can find a position that expresses somewhat more faithfully my presently developing interests. I have tenure here, and I have been offered elsewhere a chair of theoretical chemistry and two different chairmanships in biophysics departments. But after some 70 papers on optics and spectra and quantum mechanics of large molecules, I think it is time for a more drastic change, and not to an administrative job either. I am still interested in the structure of biological molecules, but I am beginning to want to go on more seriously to work on the physical organization of larger biological systems, especially the physics of perception, including its full psychological and philosophical implications, perhaps continuing along the lines of the four papers I have already written on retinal organization and on the "straight-line problem". I think it would be easier to produce a solid and idea-rich corpus of work in these areas if I shifted to a more biological or philosophical platform, somewhere where there might be students interested in these problems and colleagues who would be able both to appreciate and to criticize professionally what I am trying to do. (My wider interests in the social aspects of science and in the application of scientific creation and development to social problems -- the sort of lectures and essays in my book on "The Excitement of Science" this year -- might also find a better hearing in such an atmosphere.)

This may sound like I am trying to describe an Easterner's view of Stanford; but what I have in mind is a good school with broad interests and perhaps some strong cross-discipline groups in biophysics or biopsychology that could stand having a maverick physicist like me looking on. Since you are in the center of things on the West Coast and since you get around a good deal, I thought I would ask you to drop my name in the right circles if you should hear of an opening of this sort suitable for my talents or potential talents. At a certain stage, of course, every professor daydreams of changing platforms; but I think it is a good thing to actually carry out sometimes, and I think there is a chance that it can revivify an individual as well as a university if it brings special talents and backgrounds to new problems and a new audience.

Best personal regards. I trust I will see you in the near future at some cross-biology meeting or other.

Yours, 
John R. Platt